asked myself: Why didn't an army whose indoctrination rested on the idea of service to the Tsar disintegrate at once when the Tsarist regime collapsed? The answer lay partly in the patriotic feelings of the soldiers and partly—as in the Twelfth Army—in the work of a throng of men who had emerged from the ranks to become leaders of the enlisted men in the early days of the revolution. The chairman of the Iskosol, Kuchin, had been made a lieutenant just before the revolution, and he wore the officer's tunic with a private's cross for valor. He was not a powerful speaker but he had won the unstinted devotion of his comrades. The vice-chairman, Kharash, was a young man, tall and athletically built, with the round face of a teen-ager, an easy smile, and bold eyes. A student at law school, he was one of the Jewish intellectuals who joined the army early in the war to prove that Jews would defend Russia and, if necessary, die for it. He was a born fighter—strong, cold-blooded, fearless, resourceful, a leader of men under fire. With two crosses on his tunic, he was an ideal soldier. Among other members of the leading group in the Iskosol were an attorney and a mining engineer, both from wealthy Jewish families of Moscow, both members of the S-R party, both volunteers (for the same reasons as Kharash), and both decorated for valor. The men around them were less colorful but equally devoted to the cause of freedom and democracy. Themselves soldiers, they sympathized with the enlisted men and understood the sacrifices they demanded of them. The whole group was tightly knit together and worked like a team—a handful of men of strong will and courage who had replaced the old authorities wiped out by the deluge of the revolution.

The Soldiers' Executive received me rather coolly. The board assembled to meet me, and Kuchin, after introducing me to his comrades, asked me to present my program. "The Twelfth Army," I said, "is the key to the nation's defense. If the enemy strikes, he will strike here. Yet this part of the front is one of the weakest. Fraternization has reached dangerous proportions; some battalions are in almost open mutiny; treasonable propaganda has been spreading from the Bolshevist regiments of this army to other fronts. Am I right?"

"Of course you are," Kuchin replied. "You learned all this from our reports. But what about the reactionary officers who undermine our work? We have asked the War Ministry repeatedly to relieve the army of them. Will you help us in this matter?"

"I will do all I can to help you about the reactionary officers," I said, "and ask in exchange the privilege of working with you on the revival of the army's morale."

Kuchin's face became gentle and friendly. He stretched out his hand. "That is a deal. Now, your plans, please!"